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NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS

When Newark Was Younger



Slide of Essex County Toboggan Club down Orange Mountain, popular in 1884.

Upland Playgrounds

BY MIRIAM STUDLEY

Principal New Jersey History Librarian, Newark Public Library

WHEN strangers in Essex County hear Newarkers refer to the Orange Mountains, their first reaction is one of astonishment. It is obvious that the early settlers who named the parallel ridges First Mountain and Second Mountain had not seen hills even as high as the Berkshires. Nevertheless, mountains they are to us, and mountains they surely seemed to our forefathers from Connecticut.

Less than 10 years after Newark's founding the lots in the uplands were parceled out. From 1675, when the division was made, until 1807 the section east of High street was known as the Town at the River. All the upland to the west, as far as the top of First Mountain, was called Newark Mountain. The lots were taken up by the first settlers or their children. Some erected homes, others used the acreage for pastures, farm lands, wood lots and orchards, traveling back and forth on horse back or on foot.

It was the discovery of mineral springs at Orange that changed the manner of living there and started the suburban and recreational development of the last 100 years. The first spring to be opened was at Tory Corner, at the junction of Washington street, Valley road and Eagle Rock avenue.

The Orange Spring Hotel attracted hundreds of guests from Newark and New York, especially during 1823 when a cholera epidemic raged in the cities until Fall. Though Saratoga Springs later came to eclipse the popularity of Orange as the "chief Summer resort of the United States,"

many people of means who had vacationed in the Orange Mountains so appreciated the fine air and healthful surroundings that they built homes all along the lower slopes of the ridge.

TRANSPORTATION played an important part in the growth of the settlements along the mountain. The farmers, millers and wood cutters all benefited from the first roads put through in the early 1700s, though these were hardly more than cart tracks through woods with an occasional bridge where the streams, fuller than they are today, were too large to ford. Swinfield road was used by farmers to reach the Passaic River meadows where their pigs fed; the fastidious people of the mid-19th Century changed one end of it to Washington street, the other to Eagle Rock avenue! Early in the 1800s the turnpike era began.

Mt. Pleasant avenue, one of these early toll roads, terminated at the village of Mt. Pleasant, an important junction west of Dover. It connected the Morris County iron mines with Newark. In this era, too, developed the "shunpikes," stretches of road used by local people to detour the toll gates and avoid paying the fee.

Stages, and the early development of the Morris and Essex Railroad, helped to bring the villages of Orange and South Orange closer to the centers of trade. As early as 1857, according to The Newark Daily Advertiser of October 6, many fine residences had been erected along the slopes of the Orange

Mountains and business men were commuting to Newark and New York.

THE growth of Llewellyn Park was followed by the opening up of real estate developments known as Mountain Ridge, St. Cloud and Hutton Park. Mountain Ridge, unbroken forest in 1860, was laid out between Northfield road and Mt. Pleasant avenue by Dr. Edgar Marcy, whose brother, General Marcy, also built there. General Marcy's son-in-law, General George B. McClellan, built his home "Maywood" there in 1864. A colony of distinguished and wealthy people joined them, and a lively social life developed which attracted much public interest, intensified when General McClellan became Governor of New Jersey in 1878.

The general was very popular and was a picturesque figure as he rode over the hills on his fine horse, "Daniel Webster." St. Cloud became more of a Summer resort, with homes of a cottage type, frequented by New Yorkers who shared in the gay entertainments while Hutton Park grew up where the Essex County Country Club now stands.

Ponds, streams, and waterfalls, landscaped by the Orange Spring Company, added charm to an exclusive residential development, while the Pilot residence became the clubhouse when the Essex County Country Club bought his property in 1890. The "Blue Tavern," built in 1820, later the Van Rensselaer mansion, and many other fine homes around the Country Club became known as Hutton Park. As golf, lawn

tennis, horseback riding, a ? hunting became popular with wealthy residents, the club came a center for fashionable people from all over the country. Meets and tournaments attracted contestants and spectators from Long Island, Westchester and as far away as Boston.

THE development of horse car railways simplified the problem of getting about for people of modest means, but electric transportation brought the mountain its great popularity as a recreation area for Newarkers. The amusement park at Cable Mountain and the old cable railway leading to it were described in a story in The Newark Sunday News of August 7, this year. Cable Lake is now the swimming pool of the Rock Spring Country Club, which acquired the property in 1929. An Atlas of 1904 indicates the route of the cable road, and one of 1911 shows the zigzag path taken by the Orange Mountain Traction Company over a switchback system introduced after the accident of June 24, 1906. A favorite Sunday afternoon ride for many Newarkers, the trolley line lost in popularity as jitneys and private automobiles became common, being abandoned about 1914.

About the time that the cable Road was built, plans were made to run an electric car line to the foot of Eagle Rock. Built by the Suburban Traction Company, the line operated via Washington Street, Cherry street, Mississippi avenue, and Matthew avenue then roundabout over its own private right-of-way to Cox's Hotel on Mountain avenue. A twisting foot path led to the summit. The line was acquired in 1898 by the Orange and Passaic Valley Traction Company, according to Christopher Schmitt, chief traffic investigator for Public Service Co-ordinated Transport, and bought by Public Service about 1900.

At the turn of the century Eagle Rock became a goal for picnickers, who loved to row on a little ice pond to the south, later made into Crystal Lake. The amusement park, developed around the lake with its merry-go-round, dance hall and restaurant, became so popular that people going there stood on the running boards of the crowded open cars and conductors had a hard time collecting fares.

Change has had its way all along the mountain since the development of the automobile. Eagle Rock Reservation, acquired by the Essex County Park Commission in 1897, attracts auto parties and picnickers; Crystal Lake is popular with excursionists and ice skaters, but the Essex County Country Club has moved west over the ridge. A \$1,000,000 apartment house is being erected on the site of Hutton Park. The brook running through the 20-acre tract will be left intact, the only reminder of the romantic days of the 19th Century.

NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS



Route old switchback cars took up Orange Mountain.



Auto racing up Eagle Rock avenue once was sport.

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